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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 000987

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/TIP MEGAN HALL; SCA FOR JESSICA MAZZONE; INL FOR  
ANDREW BUHLER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: HUMAN TRAFFICKING A HOT TOPIC IN  
STATE-CONTROLLED PRESS

REF: A. TASHKENT 900  
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 787  
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 769

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Government of Uzbekistan is off to a fast start in implementing its new anti-trafficking national action plan as five of 12 provinces plus Tashkent City have already formed and convened mandated local inter-agency committees to discuss prevention and protection measures. The state-run Women's Committee of Uzbekistan also held a roundtable on August 20 with high-level official participation. State-controlled media reported each provincial anti-TIP meeting, the workshop, and several new cases in separate press articles. A key anti-trafficking NGO is delighted by the pace of change on the issue but worries the Government of Uzbekistan may get ahead of itself. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also delivered an unsolicited response to the 2008 TIP Report on Uzbekistan, which we see as a positive sign the Uzbeks are taking the issue seriously. End summary.

Provincial-level Committees Form Quickly  
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[1](#)2. (U) Per ref A, pursuant to the new comprehensive anti-TIP law, Uzbekistan adopted a national action plan which mandated the creation of both national and provincial level inter-agency committees to address TIP issues. Following quickly on the heels of the first national inter-agency meeting on July 24, state-controlled press published articles confirming that five of the 12 provinces (plus Tashkent City) have already formed and convened inter-agency committees. Meetings in Tashkent City and Jizzakh were reported on August 5; similar articles on August 12 confirmed that committees convened in Syrdaryo and Kashkadaryo Provinces; and on August 15 there was a story on the kickoff meeting in Surkhandaryo Province. Key anti-trafficking NGO Istiqbolli Avlod confirmed that the Samarqand committee has convened as well.

## Women's Roundtable

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¶13. (U) The state Women's Committee of Uzbekistan held a roundtable on August 20 in Tashkent which was attended by high-level government officials (with active leadership by Deputy Prosecutor-General Alisher Sharafutdinov) and covered in the press. Nodira Karimova, Director of the NGO Istiqbolli Avlod, told poloff that despite numerous trafficking-themed forums, conferences, and workshops held this year, this one was notable in that it was organized by the government without an international co-sponsor. She added that it contributed to the rising awareness of the problem in Uzbekistan and drove home the message that the Government of Uzbekistan is actively trying to address the issue. The main discussions focused on the provision of "socio-legal and medical help" for victims.

### New TIP Cases Reported

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¶14. (U) Uzbek newspapers also reported several new cases of human trafficking in recent weeks, continuing the trend of increasing openness and coverage of trafficking in persons cases (ref B). According to a July 24 article in Huquq, a Russian citizen who promised a Ferghana woman a job as a waitress in a Malaysian hotel was arrested while seeing the would-be victim off at Tashkent Airport. The same publication, produced by the Office of the General

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Prosecutor, reported that a Tohir Ravshanov was charged with human trafficking after allegedly promising work to three men in Kazakhstan but instead sold them to a Kazakh citizen for USD 400 each. The men "had to work for free" for a month before managing to return home, where they alerted authorities.

¶15. (U) The website of the state-run Uzbekistan National News Agency (uza.uz) reported on August 5 that 10 criminal TIP cases have been filed in Jizzakh Province since the beginning of the year, adding that those who "committed such crimes with the aim of making easy money have been strictly punished for their deeds."

¶16. (U) The Ministry of Justice's publication, Inson va Qonun, reported on August 5 that three members of an Uzbek criminal group were arrested on March 26 after "adding a psychotropic substance" to the soft drinks of five Uzbek women and selling them for USD 250 in Kazakhstan, where they were forced to work as prostitutes. The investigation is still ongoing.

### Too Much of a Good Thing?

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¶17. (SBU) Karimova told poloff that she and fellow anti-trafficking activists are delighted by the pace of progress in Uzbekistan, and they could not have imagined the government would move so quickly and energetically to implement the new law. Yet Karimova (please protect) also expressed concern that the government may be getting ahead of itself, and that there may be too many big changes too quickly without sufficient organizational capacity to properly implement them. She said there is a need to make sure the significance of all the major developments of the past few months -- the new law, adoption of the UN Protocol (ref C), the national action plan, inter-agency committees, and results of several workshops -- filters down to local level officials. Some local officials were still unaware of what the law even said, Karimova reported, which prompted her to produce reference booklets for local officials as part of an ongoing INL-funded project. (Note: This project has had a major impact and we support her idea to provide more in-depth training to law enforcement officials throughout the country. End note.) She also mentioned that high-level

policymakers may believe they have done their part and they may not pay attention to TIP long enough to fine-tune the laws as shortcomings are identified.

¶18. (SBU) Karimova is also unsure about the future of shelters according to the new Uzbek law, which specifies that they should be supported with public funds. She said the only examples of publicly operated shelters that she is aware of are in Belarus and Moldova (with plans in Azerbaijan as well), which she believes are not successful models. Karimova added (please protect) that Uzbekistan, which has a bare-bones social service system in the best of situations, "is not ready" to administer shelters; therefore, she hopes the government will not rush to put an ineffective structure in place.

#### Uzbek Response to TIP Report

¶19. (U) On August 7 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a diplomatic note to the Embassy "to state the Government of Uzbekistan's position with respect to recommendations" in the 2008 TIP Report. The note reiterated Uzbekistan's efforts to ratify ILO Conventions 138 and 182, adding that child labor "is not mandatory...but is an additional support in family farms." Concerning the need to improve data collection, the MFA note reminded that "until recently the country did not

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have separate laws on criminal aspects of TIP." Changes are underway, it assured, including more strict punishments once the criminal code is revised. The note also described plans for greater assistance to victims and more public awareness campaigns. (Note: We will forward the full text of the translated note to G/TIP. End note.)

Comment:

¶10. (U) The Government of Uzbekistan has decided that trafficking in persons is a hot issue, and the abundance of press articles on recent arrests and new anti-TIP activities are playing a positive role. The Uzbeks made a surprisingly fast start out of the gate since the release of the 2008 TIP Report, and the unsolicited response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs demonstrates Uzbekistan's determination to solidify its hold on Tier 2 on next year's edition.

BUTCHER